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ABSTRACT

This study compared the characteristics of freshman teacher aspirants choosing to continue in or leave a teacher education program at the end of their first year. Personality characteristics of the freshmen (n=102) were assessed with the Personal Orientation Inventory which consists of 150 two-choice comparative value-judgment items reflecting the values and behaviors seen to be of importance in the development of the self-actualizing individual. Career maturity variables were assessed with the attitude and competence scales of the Career Maturity Inventory, comprised of scales on: decisiveness, involvement, independence, orientation, and compromise. Demographic data, including father's and mother's educational level and occupational status, and motives for and influences on the the decision to become a teacher, were assessed with a locally-developed survey instrument. Results of the comparisons between "stayers" and "leavers" suggested that: stayers are less flexible, less sensitive to their own feelings and needs, and less able to develop warm interpersonal relationships with others than the leavers. Stayers also tended to be more other-directed and less acceptant of their own and others' anger than the leavers. The results appear to confirm previous research findings that persons attracted to teacher education programs possess personality characteristics distinguishing them from others. (JD)

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Characteristics of Freshmen Continuing and Leaving a Teacher Education
Program at the End of Their First Year

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Recent publications such as those by Feistritzer (1984) and Weaver (1984a, 1984b) reflect the renewed critical interest of educators in students aspiring to teach as a career, and in the teacher education programs designed to prepare them. Based upon survey data from more than 800 teacher education programs and from teacher certification offices in all 50 states, Feistritzer noted: "far too many teacher education programs accept anybody, and everybody who harbors the slightest aspiration to teach" (p. 59). In his review of research investigating the academic characteristics of teacher aspirants, Weaver reflected that "an uninformed observer might infer that standards of any kind have ceased to exist in education" (1984 a, p. 109). Joining the current debate regarding the talent of teacher aspirants and the standards of teacher education programs, Savage (1984) agreed that, while programs designed to improve the quality of education need to determine ways to attract talented students to education, "adequate indicators" of prospective teacher quality, beyond test scores, need to be identified (p. 106).

One relatively unexplored area warranting consideration when examining aspirants to the profession is the assessment of their dispositional variables: perceptions, attitudes, and values. For example, to what extent do teacher aspirant's perceptions of and attitudes towards themselves and others, the processes by which they elected to become teachers, and their commitments to the profession relate to their potential quality as teachers? Investigations of these dispositions of teacher aspirants historically have been confined to examinations of the background influences on, and motives of those aspiring to teach. Results in this area have suggested that the desire to work with children is the primary reason given for entering the teaching profession, and that former teachers and parents exerted the greatest influence on the career decision (Fielstra, 1955; Mori, 1966; Ream, 1977; Bergsma and Chu, 1981).

Few research efforts in this area have applied the advances made during the past decade in career development theory (e.g. Walsh and Osipow, 1983; Brown and Brooks, 1984). The qualitative research conducted by Lortie (1975) and the quantitative investigations by Zak (1981; see also Zak, 1977), in Israel, are notable exceptions. On the basis of their findings, each argued that certain characteristics of persons in the occupation of teaching are perpetuated by processes of entry into, and defection from, teacher education programs.

Their proposed models of characteristics of potential teachers are consistent with Holland's (1973) contention that people search for occupational environments that are congruent with their perceptions of self. That is, according to Lortie (1975) and Zak (1981), teacher aspirants enter teacher education programs since they perceive themselves as similar to teachers with whom they have had contact. During pre-service preparation, following graduation, or following a year or two in the profession, persons perceiving themselves to be different from their colleagues (or from a redefined sense of "teacher") leave such programs and/or the profession.

While Lortie (1975) cautioned against searching for a single personality type for an occupation comprised of more than two million persons, he concluded that both the recruitment and socialization patterns of the occupation of teaching promote what he called a "conservative outlook," among its entrants and neophytes (p. 54; pp. 79-81). Zak (1981) also concluded that prospective teachers are conservative, conforming, and group dependent when compared to population norms. Additionally, Zak found that personality traits discriminated more often than cognitive abilities when comparing more than 2500 teachers aspirants to population norms. In a Canadian study reporting similar results, Dravland

and Greene (1980) found that prospective teachers in their sample tended towards submissiveness and conformity, and tended to be reluctant to deviate from perceived norms.

Based upon his findings, Zak (1981) postulated a cyclical perpetuation of certain personality characteristics in teachers: a) the conservative behavior of teachers creates an image of teaching as a conforming and conservative role; b) this image is perceived by new recruits who have not perceived an alternative in their long-term exposure to teachers; c) these recruits select themselves into teacher education programs since they perceive themselves as similar to their image of teachers; d) these later perceiving themselves to be "different" leave such programs or later, the occupation; e) more conservative, conforming people enter the occupation, remain in the occupation, and further stabilize the cycle (1981, p. 271). This formulation of entry, defection, and socialization among prospective teachers is quite similar to Lortie's (1975) description of teacher aspiration and teacher socialization.

There appear to be few studies of the defection dynamic described by Zak (1981). Most research efforts to date have confined their examinations only to persons persisting in teacher education programs or have compared teacher education students to non-education students. This study was designed to investigate the role of a number of dispositional variables as they pertain to the sustained attraction of persons to the occupation of teaching, thereby providing an examination of the models proposed by Lortie (1975) and Zak (1981). More specifically, this study compared characteristics of teacher aspirants choosing to continue in or leave a teacher education program at the end of their first year in the program.

Methods

Procedure

As part of a comprehensive and longitudinal teacher education student assessment in the College of Education at the University of Maine at Orono, begun in the Fall of 1983, 102 entering freshmen were administered a battery of tests and a survey instrument. The primary purpose of the assessment was to provide the freshmen with a variety of information about themselves pertinent to their development as teachers. The discussion of test results was planned to serve as a springboard for their exploration of their perceptions and attitudes about themselves and others, and of their commitment to the occupational role of teacher. All data were collected during their first months of enrollment in the program (September, October, 1983).

Instruments

Personality characteristics of the freshmen were assessed with the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (Shostrom, 1963; see also Knapp, 1976). The POI consists of 150 two-choice comparative value-judgement items reflecting values and behaviors seen to be of importance in the development of the self-actualizing individual. The POI is comprised of twelve scales; Time Competence (living in the past or future versus living in the present); Support Orientation (inner versus other directedness); Self-Actualizing Values (holding values of self-actualizing people); Feeling Reactivity (sensitivity to one's own feelings and needs); Existentiality (flexibility in applying values); Spontaneity (freedom in expressing feelings); Self-Regard (self-worth); Self-Acceptance (accepting self in spite of shortcomings); Nature of Man - Constructive (seeing people as essentially good); Synergy (capacity to transcend the apparent dichotomies of life); Acceptance of Aggression (in oneself and others); Capacity for Intimate Contact (ability to develop warm

interpersonal relationships).

Career maturity variables were assessed with the attitude and competence scales of the Career Maturity Inventory (CMI) (Crites, 1973). The attitude component of the CMI is comprised of the following scales: decisiveness, involvement, independence, orientation, and compromise. The competence component of the CMI is comprised of the following scales: knowing self; knowing about occupations; goal-setting; planning; and problem solving.

Demographic data, including father's and mother's educational level and occupational status, and the motives for and influences on the decision to become a teacher, were assessed with a locally-developed survey instrument.

Sample

The results of analysis of the survey data assessing the demographic characteristics of the teacher education students in the sample at the beginning of their freshman year were consistent with former research in this area, cited previously (see Table I). Sixty-four percent of the sample were female and 36% were male. Most of the fathers (61.8%) and mothers (73.6%) of the freshman teacher aspirants had not obtained a college degree. Approximately 42% of the fathers were employed in professional or semi-professional careers; the remainder had careers in skilled or unskilled occupations. Only 22.5% of the mothers were employed in professional careers with the remainder employed as skilled or unskilled workers (22.5% of the mothers were homemakers).

Teacher education students in the sample were identified as "stayers" if they maintained enrollment in the College of Education in the semester following completion of their freshman year ($n = 52$). "Leavers" were those students not enrolling in the College of Education in the semester following completion of their freshman year ($n = 50$). No distinctions were made among leavers who were dismissed from the University, who dropped out of the University of their own

accord, or who transferred to another college within the University during or following their freshman year.

Results

A majority (62.7%) of the freshmen reported that the desire to work with young people was their primary reason for entering education. Providing service to society (26.7%) and continuing desirable activities begun in high school in an occupational pursuit (9.3%) were primary reasons for entering teaching reported by the remainder of the freshmen. Forty percent of the sample indicated that no one was the most influential in their decision to become a teacher; 26.5% reported that a former teacher was the most influential while 16.7% reported that parents or other family members were the most influential in their career decision to become a teacher (see Table II).

The freshman teacher aspirants differ from the population norms on several POI scales (see Table III). As a total group entering teacher training, the students were almost one standard deviation below the population mean on the POI Time Competence and Self-Acceptance Scales. The sample was approximately one-half a standard deviation below the POI population mean on the scales: Support Orientation, Existentiality, Acceptance of Agression, and Capacity for Intimate Contact.

Differences between "stayers" and "leavers" were found on three POI scales with leavers scoring higher on Existentiality, Feeling Reactivity, and Capacity for Intimate Contact (see Table IV). No significant differences between the stayers and the leavers were found on Scales of the CMI (see Table V). Chi square analyses of parental education and occupation, reported reason for entering the occupation of teaching, the time of that decision, and the influence on that decision were also computed between stayers and leavers. No

significant differences between the groups were found for any demographic variables (see Table I and II). No significant difference in proportion of the stayers and leavers by sex was found ($X^2 = .0032$; $df = 1$).

Discussion

Freshmen teacher aspirants in this study scored one standard deviation lower than the population mean on the Time Competence and Self-Acceptance Scales of the POI, suggesting that they tend to worry about the future or events in the past versus investing themselves in the present. These data also suggest that the freshman teacher aspirants have some difficulty in accepting themselves with shortcomings. Additionally, the freshmen tended towards other-directedness, inflexibility in applying their values, and difficulty in accepting their own and others' anger and in developing warm interpersonal relationships. Comparisons between teacher aspirants persisting in teacher education programs after their first year and those persons leaving such programs suggest that: stayers are less flexible, less sensitive to their own feelings and needs, and less able to develop warm interpersonal relationships with others than the leavers. Moreover, potential differences between the two groups on the Support Orientation and Acceptance of Agression Scales of the POI suggested that the stayers tend to be more other-directed and less acceptant of their own and others' anger than the leavers.

The career maturity and career decision variables assessed with the CMI and survey instrument offer no explanation for teacher aspirants continuing in the teacher education program or leaving at the end of their first year. Additionally, sex was found to have no explanatory value for the differences in characteristics between the stayers and leavers.

The results of this study tend to confirm Lortie's (1975) and Zak's (1981)

contention that persons attracted to teacher education programs possess personality characteristics distinguishing them from others. Furthermore, these group characteristics appear to be perpetuated in the manner described by Zak by the defection of teacher aspirants who are different in the very areas distinguishing prospective teachers from population norms. The results of this study, then, offer support to the models proposed by Lortie and Zak concerning the establishment and perpetuation of certain group-specific characteristics stemming from the self-selection into, and defection from, teacher education programs by teacher aspirants.

While the results of this study tend to confirm the findings of Lortie (1975) and Zak (1981), the development of a more comprehensive research agenda aimed at a better understanding of the processes involved in teacher aspiration is indicated. Knapp (1976) reported correlations of between .30 and .42 between the POI scales determined in this study to significantly differentiate teacher aspirants from population norms (and to distinguish between stayers and leavers) and the 16PF Scales in Zak's study. Although these coefficients suggest a low but consistent degree of support for the findings of Zak's study, more research in this area is needed. Additionally, just as our incipient understanding of the roles which dispositional variables play in these processes was identified by both qualitative and quantitative approaches, so should future investigations involve both methodologies. A qualitative approach would appear to be particularly useful for identifying domains of motives, experiences, intentions, and behavior of those abandoning teacher education programs or the profession. Planned longitudinal studies (versus retrospective designs) in this area also offer genuine promise of filling some of the gaps in our understanding of the role of prospective teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and values in their persisting in the occupation, as well as in their demonstrating "quality" as

beginning teachers.

Some implications of the findings of this study for teacher education programs and the profession appear clear. Increasingly, teacher educators and teachers are being confronted by arrays of expectations, demands, new policies, legislation, and research, each outlining agendas for teachers, effective teaching, and educational planning. Therefore, a clearer identification and better understanding of the dynamics in the profession that appear to perpetuate traits such as resistance to change would appear itself to be a valuable agenda for further research. Finally, while the assessment of a smorgasboard of dispositional variables might contribute somewhat to a clearer understanding of these dynamics, assessment of such variables alone is likely to prove insufficient. Program structures and opportunities designed to encourage teacher aspirants to explore the meanings such variables have for their development as teachers are needed, as well. Combining assessment, exploration, and understanding of dispositional variables influencing teacher aspiration and teacher socialization is essential if teacher educators are to meet effectively the challenges of recruiting and educating prospective teachers in the face of a projected teacher shortage for the next decade and, at the same time, meet an aroused public's demand for a more qualified pool of beginning teachers.

Table I
Summary of Demographic Data

<u>Survey Item</u>	<u>Total (n)</u>	<u>Stayers (n)</u>	<u>Leavers (n)</u>	<u>χ^2</u>	<u>df</u>
Father's Education					
High School or less	37	19	18		
Post-Secondary Ed.	18	8	10	.62	2
College Graduate	34	19	15		
Mother's Education					
High School or less	50	23	27		
Post-Secondary Ed.	17	11	6	1.86	2
College Graduate	24	13	11		
Father's Occupation					
Professional	43	20	23		
Skilled/Unskilled	42	23	19	.61	2
Other	17	9	8		
Mother's Occupation					
Professional	23	12	11		
Skilled/Unskilled	40	19	21	1.44	3
Homemaker	23	14	9		
Other	16	7	9		

Table II
Summary of Survey Career Variables

<u>Survey Item</u>	<u>Total (n)</u>	<u>Stayers (n)</u>	<u>Leavers (n)</u>	<u>X²</u>	<u>df</u>
Primary Reason for Entering Education					
To Work with Children	47	24	23	1.35	3
Service to Society	20	11	9		
Continue H.S. Activities	7	3	4		
Extrinsic Rewards	1	0	1		
Greatest Influence on Career Decision					
Own Experience	41	22	19	.68	4
Parents-Family	17	9	8		
Former Teacher	27	13	14		
Other	17	8	9		
When decided on Career Choice					
Prior to H.S.	18	11	7	3.77	2
During H.S.	61	32	29		
After H.S.	9	2	7		

Table III

Total Sample POI Results
(N=102)

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>Deviation from Population Norms (z)</u>
Time Competence	15.2	2.8	-.9
Support Orientation	82.7	9.5	-.4
Self-Actualizing Values	20.2	7.4	0
Existentiality	19.2	3.5	-.5
Feeling Reactivity	15.9	2.9	+.2
Spontaneity	12.7	2.5	+.3
Self-Regard	12.1	2.3	+.1
Self-Acceptance	13.8	2.9	-.8
Nature of Man-Constructive	12.2	1.7	-.1
Synergy	6.9	1.1	-.3
Acceptance of Agression	15.5	3.1	-.4
Capacity for Intimate Contact	16.7	3.3	-.4

Table IV

Comparison of Stayers and Leavers
on the POI

(note: stayers n = 52; leavers n = 50)

<u>Scale</u>		<u>Mean</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>t-value</u>
	<u>Group</u>			
Time Competence	Stayers	15.1	3.2	- .62
	Leavers	15.4	2.3	
Support Orientation	Stayers	81.0	8.9	-1.91*
	Leavers	84.5	9.8	
Self-Actualizing Values	Stayers	19.9	2.3	-1.24
	Leavers	20.5	2.4	
Existentiality	Stayers	19.6	3.3	-2.08**
	Leavers	20.0	3.6	
Feeling Reactivity	Stayers	15.4	2.6	-2.00**
	Leavers	16.5	3.0	
Spontaneity	Stayers	12.5	2.3	- .78
	Leavers	12.9	2.7	
Self-Regard	Stayers	12.1	2.3	- .05
	Leavers	12.2	2.4	
Self-Acceptance	Stayers	13.3	2.9	-1.59
	Leavers	14.4	3.0	
Nature of Man	Stayers	12.3	1.4	.68
	Leavers	12.1	2.0	
Synergy	Stayers	6.8	1.1	- .82
	Leavers	7.0	1.0	
Acceptance of Aggression	Stayers	15.0	3.0	-1.81*
	Leavers	16.1	3.1	
Capacity for Intimate Contact	Stayers	16.0	3.4	-2.28**
	Leavers	17.5	3.1	

*P < .10

**P < .05

Table V

Comparison of Stayers and Leavers
on CMI Data

(note: stayers n = 52; leavers n = 50)

<u>Scale</u>		<u>Mean</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>t-value</u>
Attitudes	<u>Group</u>			
	Decisiveness			
	Stayers	5.3	2.3	
	Leavers	5.8	2.6	-1.01
	Involvement			
	Stayers	9.0	1.0	
	Leavers	9.2	1.0	- .80
	Independence			
	Stayers	9.0	1.4	
	Leavers	9.4	1.1	-1.46
Competence	Orientation			
	Stayers	7.9	2.0	
	Leavers	8.1	2.2	- .61
	Compromise			
	Stayers	5.4	1.2	
	Leavers	5.4	1.3	- .02
	Knowing Self			
	Stayers	15.1	2.6	
	Leavers	15.3	7.3	- .30
	Knowing Occupations			
	Stayers	17.3	2.5	
	Leavers	17.5	2.6	- .46
	Goal-Setting			
	Stayers	15.3	7.8	
	Leavers	14.5	2.7	1.47
	Planning			
	Stayers	14.7	2.7	
	Leavers	14.9	3.1	- .41
	Problem Solving			
	Stayers	11.4	3.1	
	Leavers	11.6	2.3	- .28

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